

Senate Bill 212
January 27, 2011
Presented by Joe Maurier
Senate Fish and Game Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Joe Maurier, Director of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here to in opposition to Senate Bill 212.

FWP has initiated the development of a broad conservation strategy and management plan for bison that will evaluate potential sites for bison in Montana. The management plan will take into consideration historical distribution, land ownership, compatibility with current land uses, forage needs, disease risk, measures to address movements and fair chase hunting opportunities for the public. FWP has conducted listening sessions with various stakeholders to identify issues of concern relative to bison and will continue a broad and inclusive public dialog through all stages of development of a management plan. In addition, FWP has also been working closely with the State Veterinarian on issues related to bison, and will continue to do so.

FWP opposes SB212, because it would eliminate any rule-making authority the Department has - and requires animal identification measures, per the Department of Livestock - and we don't know what this means. Wildlife, if possible, should not be managed as domestic livestock.

Section 6 (line 25, page 2) essentially would make translocation of bison impossible since one could claim an impact to some type of multiple use on practically any acre of public land. This bill eliminates options before they can even be explored, including those associated with tribal lands.

As you know, there are several different bison-related bills before this legislature. The scope and intent of these bills highlight the complexity of the issue surrounding bison and underscore the need for extensive public dialog surrounding the issue of bison conservation. Individual bills that stymie that dialog ultimately do a disservice to the public and their interest in a high profile and important conservation issue.

We request that you table this bill, and let the broad dialog surrounding the short and long-term role of bison in Montana happen through public planning and participation processes.